

Final Project Report to the NYS IPM Program Community IPM 2000 – 2001

Title: Great Lawns/Great Lakes: Providing Integrated Pest Management Education, specific to Lawncare, to Municipalities in the Genesee River/Lake Ontario Watershed

Project Leader(s):

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Cooperator(s):

Monroe County Health Department; Bureau of Water Quality Planning Water Education Collaborative Monroe County; Master Gardener Program of CCE - Monroe County

Type of grant:

Public Education

Project location(s):

Monroe County

Abstract:

The goal of the Great Lawns/Great Lakes program is to improve water quality by educating and encouraging homeowners to use IPM lawn care practices that would reduce pesticides and nutrient usage. Funding this project allowed us to offer our current Great Lawns/Great Lakes program, previously in only 3 neighborhoods, to all municipal properties in Monroe County.

Background and justification:

A large-scale watershed plan for Lake Ontario and the Genesee River Watershed was completed in 1997 and recommended several actions to remediate water quality problems. Public meetings were held to determine which actions were of highest priority to the community; lawn care education ranked highest. In addition, the Monroe County Health Department conducted a telephone survey in the year 2000 of 516 randomly selected county residents to gauge water quality opinions and knowledge. To the question, "Would you be willing to reduce applications of fertilizer and pesticides to your lawn, if it would improve water quality?" 81% of respondents who currently use pesticides and/or fertilizers answered "yes". This supports our premise that people will be responsive to changes in lawn care practices if they are provided education.

The Great Lawns/Great Lakes pilot project began in June 2000 currently has 20 Master Gardener volunteers working with 100 homeowners in three different community neighborhoods. Municipal officials in the towns where the three pilot program neighborhoods are located have all been interested and receptive to participating in the demonstration project. Persons living in these three neighborhoods have identified stream, pond, wetland, river, and lake pollution as serious concerns that need to be addressed. Through a survey of these homeowners in the summer of the year 2000, we have come to understand that the vast majority of local homeowners are unaware of how their current lawn care practices may negatively impact local water quality, and how this relates to our failure to meet Great Lakes water quality goals.

Objectives:

1. Provide in-depth educational programs and materials to municipal employees representing a minimum of ten municipalities.
2. Institute IPM lawn care practices on an estimated 1,000 acres of municipal lawns.
3. Project Evaluation.

Procedures:

Objective #1.

- Municipalities were asked to participate in the Great Lawns/Great Lakes project.
- Personal invitations and program announcements encouraged municipalities to set up free lawn care seminar(s) for employees and residents.
- CCE staff and volunteers are available to provide additional assistance as requested by municipal workers.
- Program overviews at meetings, educational articles, program announcements, individualized invitations, and personal telephone calls encouraged municipalities to schedule lawn care training programs and to institute IPM based lawn care practices.

Objective #2:

- Built on the positive relationships initiated at other Cornell Cooperative Extension – Monroe County IPM programs and training opportunities.
- Discussions of lawn care and IPM practices were conducted with representatives from each municipality. They were asked to provide us with information about their current lawn care practices, and what IPM based lawn care practices they had recently implemented.
- Each municipality was encouraged to take a soil sample and fertilize accordingly.
- IPM/Lawn care training for employees was scheduled.
- Individualized assistance is available, on request, to Municipalities that maintain lawns and sports fields.

Objective #3:

- Attendance counts are taken at the various presentations.
- Participating municipal representatives are being provided with environmentally friendly lawn care educational materials and asked to return a post card survey.
- Municipalities and their Conservation Boards will be encouraged to participate in this project. Information from surveys will be tabulated to provide an estimate on the number of acres being impacted.
- Participants will be asked to evaluate the training program and materials, and the assistance given by staff and volunteers.

Results and discussion:

Personal letters, telephone calls, presentations at municipal water quality committee meetings and on-site visits were made to interest municipalities in participating in this program.

Initial response to the program was lower than expected. We felt it was important to listen to their issues and consider ways of addressing them as our efforts continue. Their responses/reasons were quite varied:

- They do not use any fertilizers or pesticides and, thus, are practicing environmentally friendly lawn care;
- If they raise their mowing height, their residents will complain that the lawns look shaggy;
- They are already mowing their lawns at a height of three inches (even if the lawns do not appear that way);
- Only a few properties adjoin a water body so most do not effect our water;
- During the summer months lawn and athletic field managers were not readily available since they are out maintaining their turf throughout the majority of the growing season;
- They want to see what lead the County takes in implementing a Public Water Education Program and they will then consider their course of action.

We are aware of the above attitudes as we move forward bringing this program to local municipalities. At this point work planned with and interested municipalities includes:

- Scheduling classes to be implemented during the 2002 winter months
- Printing a series of lawncare articles (to be provided by CCE-MC staff) in their newsletters and community newspapers; it is their belief that their residents need to be educated and to understand why municipal lawns, fields, etc. will look different than they have in the past (i.e. mowed higher)
- Brochures and print materials will be made available to employees and municipal residents
- They will trial mowing fields, lawns, etc. at a higher height and see what community response they receive
- Employee and resident lawn care seminars are scheduled for January, February and March of 2002.

Through these outreach activities we expect a greater adoption of proper turf management practices, along with a more integrated approach to control weed, disease and insect problems to occur within Moroe County Municipalities.